

March 27, 2003

Dear Editor, Napa Valley Register:

You recently published two letters regarding the Bureau of Reclamation's plans for Lake Berryessa's future: "Feds Delay Berryessa Visitor Plan" by Peter Kilkus, January 29, and "Bring Berryessa Back to Nature" by Andrea Wolf, March 3.

Lake Berryessa was created with the completion of Monticello Dam in 1957. In 1958, Napa County entered into an agreement with the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, to manage recreation at the lake, and the National Park Service provided a plan to guide the creation of the lake's facilities and programs. The plan focused on public lake access and short-term recreation programs to be implemented by seven commercial concessionaires to whom 50-year contracts were issued. However, the concessions strayed from the plan and began developing large exclusive-use trailer villages which remain much the same today.

In 1975, Napa County returned the lake's management to Reclamation. An audit by the General Accounting Office cited a failure to provide outdoor recreational opportunities to the general public, but by that time the situation was beyond any simple corrective measures as more than 1,500 privately owned trailers had been established. Many of the trailers, which are vacation homes and not primary residences, are over 40 years old and occupy prime lakeshore sites, making those areas off-limits to short-term recreationists. Due to the poor condition of many of the trailers and the poor configuration of the trailer villages, there are numerous violations of health, safety, and environmental regulations and codes. Since 2000, nearly 300 of the most seriously deficient trailers have been condemned by Reclamation and removed by the owners or concessionaires. Some 1,250 trailers remain today.

In 2000, Reclamation began planning for the 2008/2009 expiration of the concession contracts. This effort, called the VSP (Visitor Services Plan), was begun far in advance of the contracts' expiration in order to provide sufficient time to complete environmental and economic studies, allow for input from the interested public and stakeholders, provide adequate time for affected concessionaires/trailer owners to make needed decisions, and allow for unavoidable delays in the process. Updated schedules are posted on Reclamation's Lake Berryessa website as needed, and bulletins and update letters have been posted on the website and mailed to some 2,000 individuals and groups on the Berryessa Mailing List.

As part of the VSP, Reclamation is developing Alternatives for the lake. One of the Alternatives features a range of new facilities and programs such as cabins, hotels/motels, RV parks, campgrounds, upgraded marinas, food and beverage operations, retail facilities, etc. Reclamation's desire is to reintroduce the lake and its more than 160 miles of beautiful shoreline to the thousands of Californians who live within a 2-3 hour drive of it. Continuation of a limited number of long-term trailers in a more acceptable configuration will also be addressed in one of the Alternatives.

We anticipate releasing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which includes the Alternatives, during Summer 2003. The DEIS and Alternatives will then be open for a 3-month public comment period, and Reclamation hopes that all interested individuals/groups will take the time to review the documents and provide comments. We expect to release the Final EIS to the public and have the Record of Decision signed in Spring 2004. Please be aware that in addition to trying to meet timetables, we are committed to ensuring a well-thought-out, quality process. The VSP will be completed far in advance of the 2008/2009 expiration of the concession contracts. Any schedule changes will be posted on the website.

For further information, to provide suggestions or comments, or to ask any questions, please see Reclamation's Lake Berryessa website at <http://www.mp.usbr.gov/berryessa/index.html> or contact Steve Rodgers, Lake Berryessa Field Office Manager, at 707-966-2111, x106, or e-mail srodgers@mp.usbr.gov. Individuals or groups who would like to be added to the Mailing List may do so through the website or by contacting Janet Sierzputowski, VSP Mailing List Manager, at 916-978-5112 or e-mail jsierzputowski@mp.usbr.gov. They may also write to: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 2800 Cottage Way, MP-140 (Berryessa), Sacramento, CA 95825. Thank you.

Sincerely,

/s/

Tom Aiken
Area Manager, Central California Area Office
Mid-Pacific Region, Bureau of Reclamation

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